(c) to what extent it will check racketing?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED): (a) to (c) The fees for all passport services including the fee for issue of duplicate passports in lieu of lost/damaged passports have been increased w.e.f. July 10, 1993. The fees have been increased to bring them in line with the cost of production and preparation of passports. The fee for duplicate passports has been increased from Rs. 50 to Rs. 2500 in India and to Rs. 6250 abroad.

It has come to Government's notice that increasing number of cases of lost passports are being reported, especially at Indian Missions abroad. Government have also received information about various rackets in different countries where passports are being tampered with and photographs substituted both in new and duplicate passports. Such cases, as and when they come to Government's notice, are investigated and where it is substantiated that there has been a malafide act, action is taken under the Passports Act, 1967.

Problems faced by Hajees

2792. SHRI DEBABRATA BISWAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Hajees were alleged to have faced problems during the recent Haj; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) and (b) Some complaints pertaining to the accommodation in Makkah were received from pilgrims among a group of 2,300 out of the total 25,000, who were allotted accommodation at a distance of about 1500 meters from the Haram Sharif; the rest being accommodated within the 1000 meters. Despite the availability of special transport arrangements for these 2,300 pilgrims some of them had difficulty on occasions in reaching the Grand Mosque for prayers which led to complaints. The more remote location of their lodgings occurred because accommodation arrangements made through a private contractor were not accepted by the Saudi authorities and fresh efforts had to be made to find the requisite accommodation at a late stage, by which time buildings closer to Haram Sharif had already been rented out.

There were also complaints from pilgrims about the flight arrangements for the Haj. Uncertainties in Air India's operations necessitated a charter with Aeroflot, which was unable to make adequate arrangements for the baggage of all the returning pilgrims. Subsequently, special arrangements were made to bring their baggage to India and to distribute it to them.

Memorials on Mahatma Gandhi's life in South Africa

2793. SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have approached the South African Government for converting the three landmark sites in the Mahatma Gandhi's life, i.e. Phoenix farm, Tolstoy farm and Peter Maritzburb, into memorials;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the South African Government's response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED): (a) to (c) In view of the fact that Government of India does not have diplomatic relations with the Government of South Africa, the question of approaching the South African Government does not arise.

Opening of Foreign Consular Offices in Bangalore

2794. SHRI B. K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the fact that Bangalore, of late, has become, the hub of sharing of international technical expertise both in engineering and electronics, with many multinationals setting up their offices there; and

(b) if so, whether Government would consider permitting overseas missions from developed countries like U. K., U. S. A., Germany, Sweden and Netherlands to open their trade consular offices in Bangalore for the benefit of local entrepreneurs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) Yes, Sir.